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ABSTRACT

This document sketches topics considered by a 1990 conference on student motivation sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education. Educational reforms of the past decade have not produced higher test scores for American students. Rather, American students score lower and study less than students in other developed countries. A number of disincentives to student effort are prevalent. These include: (1) the large number of nonacademic activities which students are encouraged to pursue, and which compete for their time; (2) public policies that reward students for making minimal efforts, a condition exemplified by the fact that, as graduation rates have risen over the past 25 years, academic achievement scores have gone down; (3) ambivalent messages sent by schools when athletes are given privileged status, and peers pressure against academic achievement; and (4) classroom practices by teachers who, although well-intentioned, give students unchallenging work, or convey to students their low expectations. Several strategies to increase student effort are suggested. Appendixes include summaries of conference papers on the role of student effort in Japanese schools; the use of compensatory practices in American schools, such as giving out test answers before a test; and students' interpretations of teachers' behavior and attitudes. (BC)

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Hard Work and High Expectations: Motivating Students to Learn

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ISSUES IN EDUCATION

Hard Work and High Expectations: Motivating Students to Learn

Tommy Tomlinson
Programs for the Improvement of Practice

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April 1992

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Preface

Across America, in state after state, a decade of major reforms in education has so far failed to produce the anticipated improvement in the quality of our schools or the academic achievement of our students.

The reform debate has intensified. Almost every day one hears of a new controversy about such issues as teacher pay and accountability, parental choice, local control of the schools, new and revised curricula and textbooks, new forms of tests and evaluation, and year-round schools.

Notably muted in the debate has been discussion of the engagement and motivation of the students themselves. It is a curious omission, for even if we raise standards and succeed at restructuring our schools and improving the quality of our teachers, the result may be little or no improvement unless our children also increase the level of their effort. After all, now as before, it is the students who must learn more, and it is they who must do the work.

Questions, therefore, arise: What part should students play in learning? What are their responsibilities? What can we do to raise the amount and quality of student effort to the levels that excellence requires?

Late in 1990, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement held a national conference on student motivation to help answer these questions. This booklet is a sketch of what we learned. The touchstone of the conference was the mounting imperative that *all* of America's students must rise to the challenge of higher standards of achievement if the nation is to continue to thrive. One conclusion cannot be overemphasized: Unless the untapped power of student effort and engagement is activated and harnessed to learning, we are unlikely to realize the benefits to achievement that the new reforms aim to make possible.

I would like to thank Tommy M. Tomlinson who conceived, organized, and chaired the conference and prepared this concise summary of the contributors' views and conclusions.

Diane Ravitch
Assistant Secretary and
Counselor to the Secretary
Office of Educational Research
and Improvement

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Introduction

Popular opinion has it that students' academic success depends on the quality of their teachers and textbooks. Ask the students themselves, however, and you get a different view. Here is how they account for their academic achievement:

- Most students believe their ability and effort are the main reasons for school achievement. By the same token, if asked whether they would prefer to be called smart or hard-working, they will choose smart almost every time. Why? Because they believe that hard-working students risk being considered either excessively ambitious or of limited ability, both of which they would find embarrassing.
- To avoid unpopular labels, students—especially the brightest—believe they must strike a balance between the extremes of achievement, not too high and not too low. Many students adopt an attitude of indifference to hard work, a stance that implies both confidence in their own ability and a casual regard for academic success.
- At the extreme, many low-achieving students deny the importance of learning and withhold the effort it requires in order to avoid the stigma of having tried and failed.

These beliefs were voiced by educational researchers at a conference on student motivation sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). They are a consequence of long-standing as well as more recent conditions of school life that limit student effort and academic achievement. Among these conditions, the following four emerged in the course of the conference discussions:

1. Students have few incentives to study.

Most educators believe that, as an ideal, all students should learn as much as their ability and effort will permit. Yet, most schools reward high achievement alone, apparently assuming that the lure of high grades and test scores will inspire effort in all. Because high ability students usually capture the best grades and test scores, the labor of less-talented students is seldom acknowledged and the grades they receive for it do not inspire effort. Hence, low-ability students and those who are disadvantaged—students who must work hardest—have the least incentive to do so. They find this relationship between high effort and low grades unacceptable, something to be evaded if possible. Some of them express their displeasure by simple indifference, others by disruption and deception.

2. Many school policies discourage student effort.

Many well-intended education policies and practices have unwittingly worked against the goal of higher achievement. For example, to increase graduation rates, some schools have allowed students to design their own courses of study, offered credit for less-rigorous alternatives to core subjects, and awarded diplomas to students who merely stayed the course and accumulated credits. While such steps may have been taken to ease the task of learning and boost the educational progress of the nation's neediest students, they have also allowed students to evade difficult academic tasks, undercut the need to make the effort, and substituted the appearance of educational attainment for its reality.

3. Peer pressure may discourage effort and achievement.

Peer pressure profoundly influences the academic behavior of students. By the time students reach their teens, peer groups may actually define the stance most of them take toward academic achievement and effort. Typically, peer pressure motivates students to stay in school and graduate, but even as they frown on failure, peers also restrain high achievement. Wise educators seek to enlist peer influence in support of higher expectations and the pursuit of excellence. But, some student cultures actively reject academic aspirations. In this case, high grades can be a source of peer ridicule; and when effort is hostage to peer pressure, those high achievers who persist anyway may face strong social sanctions.

4. Good intentions often backfire.

Many teachers are at cross purposes about setting higher expectations for low-achieving students, especially those who are disadvantaged. Simply put, teachers seek to reconcile the added student effort that higher expectations require with their concern that disadvantaged and low-ability children may be excessively burdened. In their attempt to be fair and to protect their pupils' self-esteem, teachers often excuse disadvantaged children from the effort that learning requires. This practice obscures the connection between effort and accomplishment and shields children from the consquences. The practice also sets the stage for later failure.

The conference on Hard Work and High Expectations brought together prominent researchers who addressed the topic of student motivation from different social, cultural, and instructional perspectives. Summaries of the critical elements of their findings and conclusions are incorporated in this booklet; summaries of selected papers are included at the back. The latter are samplings of the thoughtful and insightful probe of student motivation offered by the papers prepared for the conference.

All of the papers will be published in their entirety by the National Society for the Study of Education. OERI wishes to thank all of the authors for their "hard work and high expectations" and thanks NSSE for recognizing the quality of their work.

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Ability, Effort, and Academic Performance

The traditional mission of American schools was twofold: to offer a basic education to everyone who attends and to identify and encourage promising students. If ability established promise, as many teachers believed, then effort was the key to accomplishment; hard work was expected of all. When students combined inspiration and perspiration, they were usually rewarded with high grades. Nevertheless, even if less-talented children did not get and could not expect good grades, they were not excused from studying. Most teachers thought that literacy was within the grasp of almost everyone, and they expected their students to make the required effort. Then, as now, not every student complied.

As far as researchers can tell, most educators still subscribe to this traditional way of thinking and believe in the value of student effort. Yet, when achievement drops, parents and policymakers seldom blame the study habits of students. Rather, they blame the schools and, in particular, the teachers. Consequently, over the past 25 years, most educational reforms have assumed that achievement would rise if the quality of instruction, teachers, and textbooks were improved.

Left out of this assumption was the relationship that exists between academic achievement and the amount and quality of student effort. Still, the past decade has produced belated and indirect attempts to "force" greater effort by requiring minimum competency, reinstating an academic core, and raising graduation requirements. To date, these efforts have had a modest and mixed effect on achievement: somewhat better test scores in the basics for minority students but chronic stagnation for the rest, especially at the secondary level.

If these attempts at reform have not produced expected test results, neither have they yielded much greater student effort. For example, national assessments in 1979–80 and 1987-88 both found that about two-thirds of high school seniors read for less than 1 hour a day. And, while the percentage of seniors who did not read at all dropped from 44 percent to 34 percent, it remained that one-third of all high school seniors still do not open a book after school.

Moreover, American students consistently score worse and study less than students in other developed countries. Among 14 industrialized nations, for example, U.S. students rank 13th in mathematics scores.

It is no coincidence that they also spend spend 70 percent less time studying than students in four of the five top-ranked countries. Japan, the leader, is at the top of the list on both counts.

American school children are neither stupid nor lazy. The public remains convinced that schooling is the foundation of society. Parents, rich and poor, still place great store in the value of education and want the best for their children. Why, then, are so many students satisfied if they merely pass and graduate?

After 25 years of trying to fix things, it is time to face a few facts of human nature: setting higher standards and expectations is one thing, persuading students to try harder is another. Students who study too little learn too little, and educational reforms that do not change the study habits of students are unlikely to improve achievement.

Some students' favorite explanations may be on target: boring courses and bad teachers can sap the dedication of any student. But complaints of this kind have been leveled at schools and teachers for generations, and true or false, they are seldom accepted by parents or educators as a legitimate reason for not studying. Rather, other features of school life and society are contributing to the erosion of academic effort, and as we will see, many are the consequences of good intentions gone awry.

Competing Values

At the OERI conference on student motivation, a high school senior from Alexandria, Virginia, described the competition for her time this way:

"I go to school at 7:30. I have cheerleading from the end of school until about 5:30. Then I go to work and don't get home until 9:00. What more do you want?"

Good question. What exactly do we expect of our schoolchildren? At best, the signals we send about the purpose of school are mixed, especially those about the purpose of academic achievement. Compared to other developed societies, achievement in U.S. schools often takes a backseat to the whirl of student social life and the demands of a part-time job (see appendix A).

In. . .the best eastern boarding schools, the life of the mind mattered less than other goals. Many wealthy Americans sent their sons to prep school to form or reinforce personal traits, particularly self-control, sportsmanship, and leadership. [At] Harvard, Yale, or wherever, sports, clubs, parties, and friendships often overshadowed classes. By the early 20th century, the epithet. . ."greasy grind". . . applied to any unusually conscientious college student.

Robert Hampel

Most parents say they want their children to do well in school and get good grades. They also want their children to have friends and to participate in after-school activities. Teenagers are encouraged not only to learn academics but also to develop a social life, get a job, find romance, and pursue myriad other activities that compete with academics for their time and interest.

Indeed, in its quest for the well-rounded student, American society often steers the attention of students away from academic pursuits. Schools and parents encourage participation in nonacademic enterprises—sports, hobby clubs, politics, pep club, and community service, not to mention after-school jobs. For the college bound, selective colleges give preference to well-rounded applicants with outside interests and accomplishments as well as—and sometimes instead of—high grades and test scores.

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And that is where the conflict arises. So long as we are ambivalent about the comparative importance of academic achievement, we shall continue to underwrite academic mediocrity. So long as students can allocate major fractions of their time as they wish, they will likely give their studies less than the share necessary to meet higher academic expectations.

Yet the conflict itself implies the solution: if students have wide discretion in their use of time, then they also have a great deal of time that could be used for learning if they chose. But parents, teachers, and policymakers have to make the first move. They have to send students an unmistakable message that academic achievement is the students' number-one priority, the most important thing in their young lives.

Disincentives in Public Policies

As our cultural values allow our children to spread their efforts over a variety of academic and nonacademic activities, so do many of our educational policies reward students who make only minimal effort at learning. Most of these policies are aimed at easing the obstacles to learning and graduation. Their net effect, however, is to lower teacher expectations and reduce student effort.

High school completion rates illustrate the point. Completing high school is a modern necessity, critical for entry into the workplace as well as a measure of our quest for equality. We have not shirked this responsibility. The high school completion rate for 25- to 29-year-olds has leapt from 61 percent in 1960 to 86 percent today. Eighty-two percent of blacks now finish 4 years of high school, compared with 39 percent in 1960. Despite concerns about dropouts and at-risk children, the present rate of high school completion, particularly for minority children, has been hailed as one of the singular educational accomplishments of the past 25 years.

But all is not as it seems; there is a downside to this story. Completion rates measure *how many* students pass through the system, not *how much* they learn along the way. In fact, as graduation rates have gone up, achievement scores have gone down, a relationship that casts doubt on the academic integrity of the increase. In fact, some observers believe that increased graduation rates have been achieved only by reducing the standards of competence required of all students.

What was required [to graduate from high school] was taking courses, earning "credits" by passing the course, and piling up the necessary number of credits to graduate. Getting enough credits. . . required the same stretch of time of all students . . .12 grades, 12 years. . . Persistence is the minimum standard.

Robert Hampel

Similarly, the need to demonstrate academic achievement as a prerequisite for entering college has given way to the belief that any high school student who wants to go to college should not be denied the opportunity. Getting into an academically elite college is still a powerful incentive to study hard for some high school students. But even those who do mediocre or shoddy work can almost

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always find a college that will accept them, despite their academic deficiencies.

This unwillingness to link educational incentives to achievement contrasts sharply with practices elsewhere in the world. Students in other developed countries know from the outset that their performance in school will affect their future. They know school makes a difference, and they have an early and continuing incentive to study. School also makes a difference in America, of course, a big difference. But we seem to have gone out of our way to reduce its significance in the eyes of our children.

Collaboration in the School Yard

Even schools, themselves, deliver ambivalent messages about the value of serious study and academic achievement. School administrators and teachers contribute, often unwittingly, to the rationalizations students use to justify the limited effort they devote to learning. For example, when high schools and colleges give athletes a privileged status and exempt them from meeting academic standards, they mock both the need for effort and the integrity of education. They also assure that many athletes will be needlessly unprepared for college.

But the privileged status of athletes is not the only problem. Research tells us that one of the biggest disincentives to academic effort can be school-wide peer pressure. For many children, school's chief virtue is the opportunity it presents to make and be with friends. By the time most children reach adolescence, their need to belong to a crowd with similar interests and values is paramount. Moreover, fear of being cut off from the crowd is a powerful incentive to conform to its views, including those regarding academic achievement.

While teens report general agreement among their peers about the desirability of getting good grades and finishing school, few among them value academic excellence for its own sake. In fact, those who excel may forfeit their claim to popularity. Consequently, students with high academic aptitude may hide their interest and consciously restrain their achievement in order to secure social standing.

Another thing to consider is the phenomenon of peer crowds. Research shows that student crowds may take harsh measures to set limits on academic achievement. For example, when underachievement is the norm, dedicated students may be ridiculed as nerds, brainiacs, and teacher's pets. Academically inclined minority students may be accused of "selling out" and of rejecting their peers if they are hard-working and high-achieving.

In other groups, academics are important but secondary to other activities and interests. Often, members of these crowds must be careful that academic efforts and accomplishments do not distract from activities that are more central to their status in the crowd. Still other groups—such as "druggies" and "toughs"—may spurn school altogether and illustrate their indifference by refusing to study or attend class.

Any attempt to inspire greater academic effort in students will face and must overcome these powerful barriers. Greater awareness of the

dynamics of peer groups can help explain why a student might cringe at a teacher's public praise for a job well done, for example, or why some groups of students might work better together than others. Once understood, however, peer motives and pressure can, in fact, be used to advantage in the planning and design of alternative educational experiences.

Classroom Practices

Disincentives to effort and learning are also found within the classroom (see appendix B). Teachers may not insist that students work to their full potential for a variety of reasons, including protecting them from failure. They may offer challenging work but undercut their own expectations by offering students an easy way out. For example, teachers who provide students with summaries of the main ideas of a course take away the lesson in self-directed study and personal responsibility that comes from puzzling out the ideas for themselves. Giving multiple-choice tests instead of essay questions places a premium on recall and frees students from the need to make connections between principles or to apply them in new situations. Giving students the questions—sometimes even the answers—that will appear on the next test means that they have no excuse for failing the test, but it also means that they have no incentive for mastering the material.

What is being suggested here is that motivation not be seen as something existing solely in the student that he or she brings to the classroom and academic tasks; but rather as an outcome of meaningful participation in the classroom and the social practices that accomplish its everyday practical activities.

Sharon Nelson-Le Gall

These situations are not rare. Educational researchers note an increase in teacher-student "bargains," those usually tacit but sometimes explicit agreements in which teachers lower their standards in exchange for classroom cooperation. Some teachers engage in these agreements not only to maintain order but also because society holds them responsible for fulfilling its education goals. High graduation rates are seen as an indication of success, and bargains embodying lower standards let teachers and students off the hook without wholly abandoning the appearance of serious work.

Even so, when students do poorly in school, most teachers seek an explanation. Too little ability or too little effort? That is the question teachers customarily ask. How they answer may determine the child's future. Many teachers will excuse low-ability children from trying hard, some because they think it hopeless and some because they think it unfair. Paradoxically, teachers who try to protect less-able children from failure by asking less effort from them may only ensure that the

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children will not acquire needed academic skills. In the long run, such tender mercies may actually harm, rather than enhance, self-esteem.

These practices begin early in the child's educational life. At the elementary level, teachers communicate their different expectations for high- and low-achieving children in ways that are sometimes subtle and often contrary to common sense. For example, research has shown that children "read" sympathy offered to them when they fail, praise proffered for very modest accomplishments, and help tendered when it is unsolicited as signs that they lack ability. These and other distinctions are clearly drawn very early in their schooling, and children become sharply aware of cues that identify the ability levels of themselves and their classmates (see appendix C).

A variety of commonplace classroom events can convey information to children about the ability of their classmates. Even in first grade, children believe that teachers are likely to watch low achievers more closely, scolding those they believe could do better. Yet those same teachers are believed to expect less from low achievers, giving them less-challenging assignments and fewer opportunities to lead classroom activities. Children also note that high-achieving students seem to enjoy a better life in the classroom. They get to do things independently; they work on more difficult and prestigious material; and they get called on more often. From these experiences, children make inferences about their own ability, and those who conclude they are not smart enough to please the teachers or master the material will often cease trying very hard to learn.

Far too many black children perform poorly in school not because they lack basic intellectual capacities or specific learning skills, but because they have low expectations, feel helpless, blame others, or give up in the face of failure.

Sandra Graham and Bernard Weiner

That is the crux of failure. The overriding task is to create conditions in which low-ability and low-achieving children do not give up but will keep on trying.

For youngsters who learn slowly and with difficulty, there is a fine line between failure and progress. For example, elementary school children are unsophisticated learners, and the slowest among them have more than their share of trouble developing reliable and effective study habits. Accordingly, they are often subjected to rigidly programmed

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instructional routines which are designed to avoid the need for self-regulated study. However, because the method may reinforce obedience and dependence rather than self-regulation and autonomy, students may fail to develop their own study capabilities and may become unable to learn effectively when they are on their own.

Not that educators are unaware of the distinction. Teachers have long noted that classrooms filled with children who regulate their own behavior are likely to be more productive than those whose children must be coerced into cooperation. Yet goals such as these have been elusive, especially in schools that serve a disadvantaged clientele and which rely heavily on imposed control to maintain orderly classrooms.

"Preventive classroom management" offers teachers an alternative to traditional—but ever less effective—authority as the principal method to win the attention and cooperation of students. Indeed, modern management strategies are being developed that engage students as a cooperative social group in which they learn to regulate their own behavior without the imposition of external authority. The eventual goal is students who are responsible for much of their own learning and the selection of many of their academic tasks.

The key to the management strategy, and to a similar parenting strategy, is captured in the phrase "authoritative teaching." In contrast to "authoritarian" methods which are essentially non-negotiable demands for obedience, authoritative teaching (and parenting) offers a plan of continuous negotiation of control and responsibility which is contingent on the demonstrated self-control and adaptive capabilities of the maturing child. When combined with appropriate strategies of parenting, schools can offer students a consistent set of experiences designed to develop internal control and self-regulation.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Plainly, the obstacles to learning far exceed the limits imposed by student ability and background. Understanding the many reasons why students avoid hard work is important, but understanding alone will do little to alter the situation. Other steps must be taken:

- We must make learning the highest priority in our children's lives; they have no future without it.
- We, as a nation, must act to focus the attention of students on the educational substance we agree is critical to the nation's future as well as their own.
- We must define the skills we expect and believe all our children should develop and all our schools must teach.
- We must act on the knowledge that the connection between learning and academic effort is powerful.

The task is daunting, but help is available. At the federal level, world-class standards of academic performance in mathematics and science are being developed in company with skill standards necessary to meet and surpass the workforce requirements of the coming decades. Education researchers across the country are generating new information about why children do not work hard or effectively and what can be done to help. Our teachers are developing classroom strategies that can reinvigorate academic motivation and effort. They and other educators have suggested strategies that can help children make the effort required to learn. Among them:

- Establish a schooling format that offers a better balance between the rewards for effort and for ability. Set goals for each child that can be achieved with high effort, and reward their attainment. Schools can engage children who are less talented and motivated by devising alternate incentives that reward study and personal accomplishment as well as high scores and class standing. Effort and ability are, after all, the child's tools for learning. Both must be encouraged simultaneously.
- Enhance the status of "doing one's best." Rewarding only high academic achievement can turn learning into another competition with rewards available only to a few. Public recognition of individual excellence, regardless of its rank, is one way to motivate more students, but also perhaps the most

overlooked. Schools should look for ways to recognize outstanding performances in areas outside the core curriculum but consistent with goals of schooling.

Evaluation systems that de-emphasize competition, provide feedback on individual progress, and minimize public comparability have been found to facilitate student learning, motivation, and effort, especially for students possessing a low self-concept of academic ability.

John Thomas

- Eliminate obstacles to innovative classroom practices, most notably school policies that are inconsistent with self-regulated student behavior. For example, classrooms that emphasize cooperative learning—a routine consistent with pupil self-regulation—employ an instructional strategy that is inconsistent with those that emphasize competitive personal achievement. Avoid practices that undercut student initiative—offers of help where none has been requested, for example, or help that offers a solution rather than a method to figure out the answer. Instigate opportunities for students to seek and provide help to one another in developing an effective exchange of ideas, learning strategies, interests, and goals.
- Send the right signals about the comparative importance of academic and nonacademic achievement. Schools should insist, for example, that athletes meet the same standards as other students. This can help brighten the image of effort-based learning as well as improve the athletes' preparation for college. It can also reduce student cynicism about the integrity of academics and help convince even varsity players that learning is the most important activity they can embrace.
- Adopt incentive systems that encourage students to strive toward a standard of knowledge instead of competing against each other. Instructional practices that associate success with effort encourage initiative and persistence as well as a growing sense of personal competence.
- Teach children *how* to learn. There is more to effort than spending time working on a task. The quality of effort is even more important than the quantity. Students seldom learn by themselves how to study effectively, but little classroom time is spent helping them develop that skill. Teachers can assist

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students with their studying by stressing proficiency in such areas as notetaking, writing summaries, self-testing, creating study plans, and time management.

- Provide supports matched to course demands. The returns to student effort will be increased if teachers do the following simple things:
  - — Explain clearly to students what is expected of them, how much work it will require, and how they will be graded.
  - — Guide students in how to carry out homework and study for tests.
  - — Give extensive practice on instructional objectives.
  - — Give extensive feedback on quizzes, homework, and tests.
  - — Give significant credit for successfully completing homework.

As with most academic tasks, high-ability students have the edge in picking up these "tools of the trade." But efficient and time-saving methods are especially important for slower learners who are less likely to pick them up from experience and who will not pick them up at all if they abandon learning early on.

Even among students bound for college, a third or more graduate from high school unprepared to engage in effective academic work. They spend much of their first year in remedial courses and in learning how to study on their own. Some may lack even the most elementary skills. For example, American students are seldom taught to take notes. In contrast, Japanese students are introduced to notetaking in the first grade, and by the fifth or sixth grade, they are keeping notebooks filled with the results of their daily classwork and home studies.

All of this, of course, is easier said than done. Teachers need exposure to good training; they cannot be expected to solve problems of student motivation by themselves. Many of the school and classroom practices and behaviors that undermine academic achievement result from conflicting messages embedded in our cultural values. We must abandon our ambivalence about educational achievement and academic ability. Lowering standards will not solve the problem. To meet higher standards, we must require and reinforce effort that only the students themselves can provide. The best reforms and the best intentions will not carry the day unless they tap the effort as well as the ability of our children.

List of Participants

Authors and Presented Papers:

B. Bradford Brown. "School Culture, Social Politics, and the Academic Motivation of U.S. Students." Widely known for his work on peer pressure on teenagers, Brown is a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and research scientist at the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Antoine M. Garibaldi. "Creating Prescriptions for Success in Urban Schools: Turning the Corner on Pathological Explanations for Academic Failure." Garibaldi is dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of education at Xavier University in Louisiana. He has been a teacher and administrator in elementary and secondary schools and was a researcher with the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute of Education between 1977 and 1982.

Sandra Graham and Bernard Weiner. "Attributional Applications in the Classroom." Formerly a social studies and English teacher at a junior high school, Graham is now an associate professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Weiner, a professor of psychology at UCLA, is a Guggenheim Fellow and recent recipient of the Distinguished Research in Social Psychology Award from the Psychological Association.

James Guthrie, Martin V. Covington, and Florence Webb. "Carrots and Sticks: The Motivational and Performance Implications of Incentive Programs." Guthrie, selected in 1990 as the American Education Research Association's first senior fellow, is assigned to the National Center for Education Statistics to assist the agency in developing a strategic plan. Covington is professor of psychology and research psychologist in the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research at the University of California, Berkeley. Webb is completing work for the Ph.D. in educational policy analysis at the University of California, Berkeley.

Robert L. Hampel. "Historical Perspectives on Academic Work: The Origins of Learning." An associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Delaware, Hampel is the author of *The Last Little Citadel: American High Schools since 1940.*

Mary McCaslin and Thomas Good. "Motivational Effects of Classroom Management." McCaslin and Good are associate professor and professor, respectively, of curriculum and instruction in the College of Education at the University of Missouri. Good is also a research associate at the Center for Research in Social Behavior in the Graduate School at the University of Missouri and the editor of the *Elementary School Journal.*

Sharon Nelson-LeGall. "Perceiving and Displaying Effort in Achievement Settings." Nelson-LeGall is a nationally recognized researcher and scholar in the area of social-cognitive and personality development in the preschool through early adolescent years.

Lois Peak. "Academic Effort in International Perspective." Peak does comparative international research at the National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education

John W. Thomas. "Expectations and Effort: Course Demands, Students' Study Practices, and Academic Achievement." An independent educational researcher and visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, Thomas is currently focusing on the relationship among course features, student characteristics, and students' study activities.

Tommy M. Tomlinson. "Hard Work and Higher Expectations: Education Policy and the Downside of Good Intentions." Tomlinson, chairman of the conference, is a senior associate at the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. He has served as research coordinator on a number of federal conferences and commissions, most notably the National Commission on Excellence in Education and its landmark report, *A Nation At Risk*.

Rhona S. Weinstein. "Different Lives Within the Classroom and the School: Children Make Sense of Ability." Professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, and director of the Clinical Psychology Training Program and its associated Psychology Clinic, Weinstein has been studying the dynamics of teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies in elementary school classrooms from the child's point of view.

Discussants:

Gene I. Maeroff, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, was formerly the national education correspondent for *The New York Times*. He is the author of several books, including *The Empowerment of Teachers* and *The School-Smart Parent*.

Daniel Resnick is professor of history and director of European Studies at Carnegie Mellon University. He has undertaken several historical studies that bear on current educational policy, including a study of cultural and institutional obstacles to more effective schooling.

Linda Weber is the principal of Rosemary Hills Primary School, a magnet school for prekindergarten-second graders in Montgomery County, Maryland. She has worked as a teacher at all levels and in such diverse areas as inner-city Los Angeles and rural Pennsylvania.

Patrick Welsh has taught English at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia, for 20 years. He writes on school and the youth culture for *The Washington Post* and is the author of the book, *Tales Out of School*.

Appendices

Summaries of Three Conference Papers

Appendix A

Effort: The Key to Japan's Academic Success

Lois Peak

Japanese and American families share a similar standard of living and economy, and their children share many similarities in style of life. For example, Japanese children listen to the same popular music groups and watch similar television programs. Why, then, do Japanese children perform so much better academically than American children?

Lois Peak says the answer lies in the Japanese view that any child can master the curriculum if he or she tries hard enough. "Effort," writes Peak, "is so consistently portrayed to children as the key to success that ability is rarely mentioned." Slogans urging children to persevere line classroom walls. Public recognition ceremonies reward outstanding effort rather than academic accomplishment. Ability grouping is virtually unheard of.

Japanese schools not only teach the value of effort but teach children to make an effort. Teachers use routine daily drills to instill perseverance, self-discipline, and concentration. In the earliest grades, this habit training emphasizes physical perseverance. Children are encouraged to push themselves beyond what they expect they can do. They eventually come to realize, Peak says, that with disciplined effort, they in fact are capable of doing more than they thought they could.

Perseverance is extended to academic subjects, and daily homework plays an important part in this habit training. Surveys show that even in elementary school, Japanese children typically spend at least twice as much time on homework as U.S. children do. "Homework not only reflects the strength of teachers' belief that extra practice makes a difference and students' willingness to exert extra effort on behalf of their studies," Peak writes, "it also reflects [the Japanese] emphasis on training in good study habits and self-disciplined effort toward a long-term goal."

In contrast to American society, which permits nonacademic activities such as sports, friends, and hobbies to intrude on school work, the Japanese are careful to maintain the school and family as the center of students' lives. Schools discourage the frequenting of shopping malls, coffee shops, and other places where students might congregate. In

many communities, parents help by patrolling their neighborhood to keep a watch on their children's behavior.

Children must be 18 years old before they can get a driver's license, and although Japanese laws on child labor are more liberal than those in the United States, student employment is discouraged. Only 21 percent of Japanese high school students report holding a part-time job, compared with 63 percent in the United States. Instead of being viewed as a valuable tool in developing a sense of responsiblity (as it is in the United States), part-time work in Japan is seen as a distraction from the primary job of education.

Adolescent experimentation with the pleasures and vices of adult life are discouraged. "It is only after the majority of students have finished their schooling that young people begin to date, drive, hang around in the city, drink, and come home late at night." Peak explains. "Students in high school remain sheltered and protected, and the society conspires to keep their minds focused on study."

There can be little doubt that Japanese cultural values are well suited to encouraging effort and academic achievement. In marked contrast, American culture treats academic learning as merely one of many desirable results of schooling, and studying is an option that students may exercise at their discretion. The question, Peak suggests, is whether "Americans care enough about improving our students' academic effort to campaign long and hard enough to change our cultural priorities. Are we willing to do this at the risk of de-emphasizing some of our other cultural values?"

Appendix B

Supports and Compensations

John Thomas

Setting higher academic expectations for children to encourage greater effort and more learning has been one of the key strategies of the school reform movement. Too often, however, the purpose has been defeated by instructional compensations, usually well-intentioned, that subvert the higher demands.

For example, higher-order thinking is an earnestly sought intellectual capability. Signs that one possesses this skill include the ability to note relationships among ideas and extend concepts and principles to other contexts. An essay test rather than a test of memory and recall is required to assess the status of this skill. But the kind of integrative learning required to write a good essay is undermined if, on the day before the test, the teacher passes out a review sheet giving students the essay questions and model answers to go with them.

In other words, Thomas explains, when students are asked to do integrative thinking, they are compensated "by being given the answers to integrated questions in advance of the test." As a result, they are challenged to do little more than memorize the handout sheet.

Having examined the link between course demands and student study practices, Thomas finds this kind of compensation to be nearly universal at the high school level. Instead of giving students a list of content areas, an example of a test item, or general advice about how best to study for a test, teachers often provide students with a selection of items to be committed to memory, summaries of the main ideas or, sometimes, the exact questions and answers that will appear on the test. Some teachers also allow students to compensate for poor performance on tests by giving make-up exams, lowering the weight given to test scores in the final grade, or giving tests that are much easier than the course content.

The students themselves aid and abet this process in their own approach to learning. After surveying the evidence on study habits, Thomas concludes that students spend a minimum amount of time studying and doing schoolwork in school settings; their work is shallow, repetitive, and unproductive when they study alone; they show little of

the higher-order thinking skills that most educators believe necessary for mature information processing and problem solving; and they appear uninterested in planning and executing self-management activities.

On the other hand, Thomas has found that certain kinds of supports can induce the kinds of study practices that lead to mastery of course content and the kinds of integrative learning and problem-solving skills necessary to succeed in college or the workplace. Setting clear goals and teaching students the techniques of studying are two important supports. Testing students on the material covered by homework and classwork is also important. Rather than supplying review sheets, teachers can test students' understanding of the subject by asking them direct questions or by giving them time to ask questions.

Thomas, like other researchers, finds feedback to be a critical support. The more individual students receive written comments from their teachers, the more inclined they are to develop study aids, such as notetaking, Thomas said. The more thorough the feedback on quizzes and homework, the more likely they are to manage their study time effectively and to take the initiative for their own learning.

Thomas cautions, however, that it will not be easy to rid the nation's classrooms of compensatory practices. "These practices may ensure that students succeed in a course to some degree," he said. "Removing these compensations carries with it a great risk of student failure and, by extension, teacher failure. . . We cannot expect teachers to act in ways that will increase the risk of student failure (increasing homework, raising standards, dropping compensations) unless and until we are able to demonstrate to them that other provisions (feedback, articulated practice material, study-skills training) will offset the risk they anticipate."

Appendix C

Attribution Theory: A Key to Understanding

Sandra Graham and Bernard Weiner

Sandra Graham and Bernard Weiner, researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, are interested in how children account for their achievement in school. They find that most children explain their successes and failures with four possible causes: ability (both aptitude and acquired); effort (how much); difficulty (how hard); and help (or hindrance) from others. Ability and effort are by far the most common causes mentioned by both teachers and children, and both constantly wonder whether failure should be attributed to too little effort or too little ability. Determining the correct cause may decide the child's educational prospects.

Students receive external cues about their own ability, many of them—unknowingly and unintentionally—from teachers.

For example, research has shown that teachers tend to sympathize with students whose failure they attribute to lack of ability, while they get angry with students who fail for lack of effort. Students read the implicit message in these emotional cues the same way: pity is an ascription of low ability, anger one of low effort.

Other common teacher behaviors send similar signals. "A student who receives a lot of praise from [the] teacher for an easy success is perceived as high in effort (and therefore low in ability), when compared to another student who achieves the same outcome and is not praised," Graham and Weiner write. Likewise, students who receive unsolicited help from the teacher are also perceived to be low in ability.

To understand the consequences of these subtle and indirect cues about ability and effort, we must first understand how we tend to think about ability and effort. Most people believe ability to be a personal characteristic that is relatively fixed and beyond the individual's personal control. "This means that failure due to low aptitude is perceived as a characteristic of the failing individual, enduring over time, and beyond one's personal control," the authors say. Effort, on the other hand, is seen as a something that can vary from one situation to the next and that the individual can control.

Various emotions are associated with these perceptions. Children feel pride in themselves if they think the source of their success is a personal attribute such as ability or effort. For example, a pupil who believes he or she has failed because of low ability is likely to feel humiliation and hopelessness, emotions associated with beliefs that personal failures are due to uncontrollable causes. On the other hand, a student who believes he or she has failed because of low effort, may feel guilty about not having tried harder but optimistic about doing better in the future.

How does all this affect student motivation? Graham and Weiner describe how two students who both fail the same math test might respond in very different ways. Jane, who has always done well in the past, attributes her failure to inadequate preparation and feels guilty. The anger and criticism expressed by her teacher and parents reinforce her perception that lack of effort, not inability, was the cause of her failure. Optimistic that she will do better on the next exam if she tries harder, Jane is motivated to find a math tutor and spend more time studying.

Susan, on the other hand, has done poorly on previous math tests and attributes this latest failure to low ability, a perception that is reinforced by the teacher's sympathy and lack of criticism. Believing that she is unable to do anything to improve her performance, Susan decides to drop out of school.

Graham and Weiner believe that this attribution theory is the key to "best understand racially linked deficits" in academic performance. "Far too many black children perform poorly in school not because they lack basic intellectual capacities or specific learning skills, but because they have low expectations, feel helpless, blame others, or give up in the face of failure." They postulate that the history of academic failure among blacks may make them more likely targets of sympathetic feedback from teachers and, thus, the inadvertent recipients of low-ability cues. Furthermore, they observe that teacher behaviors that communicate low ability—such as unsolicited help and excessive praise for easy success—may be subtly incorporated into many instructional programs designed for educating disadvantaged minority children. Such programs entail simple questions, help for students who appear to need it, and little criticism from the teacher.

"We are not so naive as to think that our attributional approach has all (or even most) of the solutions to the motivational problems of African-American children," they conclude. "What it does offer us, however, is a framework to begin to ask some of the right questions."

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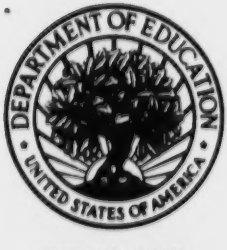

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